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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: WHITHER 2011 ELECTION: PRESIDENTIAL  
CAMPAIGNING UNDERWAY, DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS UNCERTAIN

REF: A. ABUJA 845  
[1](#)B. ABUJA 514  
[1](#)C. ABUJA 792  
[1](#)D. LAGOS 215  
[1](#)E. ABUJA 896  
[1](#)F. ABUJA 826  
[1](#)G. ABUJA 791  
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[1](#)J. ABUJA 795

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Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Introduction: As Nigeria marks the second anniversary of President Yar'Adua's inauguration, the country has already begun the political maneuvering leading up to the 2011 Presidential elections. This will make it even more difficult for Nigeria to move forward on good governance issues from electoral reform to fighting corruption and improved party politics. Civil society organizations (CSO) and academics are already showing signs of major discontent and are forming coalitions to push electoral reform. Academics are speaking out, and our interlocutors are still claiming (and maybe really hoping) that the military means what it says (and for the most part has shown) that it respects civilian authority and will stay in the barracks through what we know will be the ups and downs of political life until the 2011 election. The Niger Delta is still not being handled well by the Yar'Adua Administration and the recent military operations in Delta state (ref E) could end up making things worse, particularly if reports of civilian casualties are verified and militant elements move in to other states. Opposition politics are weak and the National Assembly has not yet lived up to expectations that it would take the lead on improving Nigeria's democracy. Although over the last two weeks, it has shown some backbone on electoral reform, as it is now looking at the full Electoral Commission Report rather than just accepting the Executive Branch's submissions.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Inter- and intra-party politics remain driven by personalities, not issues. Meanwhile, the ruling People's

Democratic Party (PDP) is disorganized and fractious, with camps for and against Yar'Adua, each calculating whether he lives to run in the 2011 elections, or dies before then because of his serious health issues. The atmosphere on the ground is a mix of indifference by some who assume that nothing will ever change; concerns over the manipulation of the 2011 election by selected individuals, including at the state level (ref A); and efforts by CSOs, academics, and some elites to find a way to stop what appears to be the inevitability of another bad election process in 2011.

13. (S/NF) There may be some hope for progress if the National Assembly really bucks the Executive Branch's apparent white-wash of electoral reforms. Meanwhile the U.S. Mission is already actively engaging with CSOs, on the campaign watch with field travel (refs F-I); trying to help with capacity building at the National Assembly; helping with voter awareness programs for women and the disabled; and, working with political parties on improving internal democratization. However, the current atmosphere portends a non-favorable scenario for Nigeria in the near term on democratic and electoral reform, but also presents unique challenges for our bilateral relationship and agenda. We will need to decide how tough publicly we want to be with the Nigerian Government (GON) on what we care the most about: democracy/election reform, corruption, human rights, and drug trafficking. We tend to hit the GON hard privately, but what they are most sensitive to is saving face and statements from the international community.

14. (S/NF) Since the start of 2008 we have stepped up the push for democratic reforms as part of what we thought Yar'Adua would accomplish coming off his December 2007 visit to the White House. However, he accomplished none of these

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reforms in 2008. Since the beginning of this year, we have made our policy speeches on the ground tougher, as well as our private conversations with the GON. However, GON grand-standing has continued to detract from any real progress; we and other friends of Nigeria will need to consider a style shift if we expect any change from this government, or hope to derail the train wreck we foresee now on the 2011 election.

15. (S/NF) There is within the CSO community, academic elites, and other eminent Nigerians the desire to do and say more, but we may need to publicly add our voice more to this dialogue. Some CSOs are calling for civil disobedience by the body politic (along the lines of what happened in Ekiti (see refs C & D)) to show the GON elite their displeasure with the business-as-usual vote rigging and fraud. We may see more shenanigans in the remaining state tribunals or elections from 2007 that have yet to be held (ref A). There are several key areas that we focus on below -- PDP politics and maneuvering; Yar'Adua's health issues; scenarios for 2011; and implications for the USG -- that set the stage for what could happen in Nigerian politics from mid 2009 onwards. End Introduction.

Pre-election Mode Already/Campaigning Under Way

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16. (S/NF) As Nigeria marks the mid-point of President Umaru Yar'Adua's term, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the country's political class has already begun to maneuver for the 2011 Presidential elections. We have elsewhere (see ref A) reported that re-election signs for the gubernatorial races are already appearing in several states. While the same cannot be said regarding the Presidential race (and indeed in some places billboards from the 2007 elections can still be seen), it is nonetheless clear that maneuvering within the PDP is already under way. In some ways, this repeats the pattern we saw in mid-2005, when then-President Obasanjo began floating the idea of amending the Nigerian constitution to allow himself to run for a third term. While

that effort failed, it nonetheless brought forward, and brought into the open all the behind-the-scenes maneuvering among those within the ruling party who were angling to replace him as the party's candidate in 2007.

¶17. (S/NF) There is little evidence that any of the opposition parties are likely to be able to mount much of a challenge to the PDP at the national level (though, as reported in ref A, they may do so in some states). In addition, efforts to form an opposition "mega-party" do not appear to be getting off the ground. It is therefore curious that so much scheming and maneuvering should be going on within a majority ruling party which remains unchallenged across more than half the country, and which has an incumbent President who is constitutionally free to stand for a second term in 2011. This situation has emerged because the PDP leadership is having to deal with two major challenges: first, the Yar'Adua administration has failed to accomplish much of anything, either in pursuing its announced "Seven-Point Agenda;" and secondly nor has it addressed any of the numerous political and economic problems and crises which have arisen in the past two years. Thirdly, reports persist that the President's health may prevent him from standing for re-election in 2011, if indeed he survives until then, and substantial questions remain about the suitability of his current Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, to serve as his successor. Were it not for these challenges and the poor election reform process, there would be little need to say anything about the 2011 Presidential race at this stage. Yar'Adua would already be the odds-on candidate for re-nomination by the PDP, and, given the extraordinary unlikelihood of substantial electoral reform over the next two years, the almost certain "winner."

¶18. (S/NF) We do not intend here to review the substantial reporting in other USG channels on the health question. Our

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focus, instead, is on the maneuvering going on within the Nigerian political class, some of whom have substantial inside information on the President's health and prospects for survival, and some of whom do not. Whatever the true state of Yar'Adua's health, it is clear that a small group from his inner circle at the Presidential Villa is carefully, and largely successfully, managing what others are able to know about his medical state.

PDP on Yar'Adua: Bad If He Leaves; Bad If He Stays

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¶19. (S/NF) To understand the difficulty faced by the PDP, one must first understand the nature of that organization, which is essentially a coalition of networks of patrons (usually called godfathers) and clients working together to control the division of offices and oil revenue. While the PDP leadership may care little about popular support, as was again demonstrated by its shameless rigging of the Ekiti by-election (refs C & D), it cares a great deal about maintaining the dominance of this delicate balance of godfather networks, which is its reason for being.

¶10. (S/NF) A key element of that fragile equilibrium is the informal understanding that the most valuable office, the Presidency, would rotate periodically between the major ethno-religious groupings, between Southerners and Northerners, Christians and Muslims. Having, to their mind, suffered through eight years of a government dominated by the Southern Christian Olusegun Obasanjo, Northern political leaders were eager for a new President who would, they hoped, better represent their concerns and interests. The possibility that, after only one term or less, the Northern Muslim Yar'Adua would be replaced by VP Jonathan, a Southern Christian (like Obasanjo) and a man who has never demonstrated any particular leadership ability, would be viewed by many Northerners as unfair, if not illegitimate. (Jonathan is also not popular in the Southern region outside

of his Niger Delta State of Bayelsa).

¶11. (S/NF) Moreover, either a continuation of the Yar'Adua government or its replacement by one headed by Jonathan would pose another kind of threat to the PDP's hold on power. This includes a continuation of the dysfunctionality which, for the last two years, has increasingly been the state of the Nigerian executive and the Yar'Adua administration. This is a circumstance for which this country's political culture is wholly unsuited, and which would lead some to question the ability of the government to maintain sufficient order to keep the economy functioning. During its first year in office, soaring oil prices kept the Yar'Adua administration sufficiently "in the money" so that the lack of progress on reform and spreading violence in the Niger Delta could be overlooked; the oil price collapse of 2009, however, is already making this a difficult stance to maintain.

Villa Clique's View: He's Not Sick, and He's Getting Better

¶12. (S/NF) First Lady Turai Yar'Adua and a group of family and close confidants at the Presidential Villa, mostly from the President's home state of Katsina (particularly Agriculture Minister Sayyid Ruma, Presidential Economic Advisor Tanimu Yakubu, Senator, Senate Defense Committee Chair, Ibrahim Ida, Senator Kanti Bello, business magnate Dahiru Mangal, and, according to some, Katsina Governor Ibrahim Shema), as well as a few others like Kwara State Governor Bukola Saraki, know more about his health than anyone else. This group, which has benefitted enormously from its special access to the President, has a vested interest in maintaining the impression that he is likely to remain in office for the foreseeable future. Any suggestion that he might not be able to complete his term, and indeed be unable to stand for re-election, would render Yar'Adua a lame duck and undermine the position of all those around him.

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¶13. (S/NF) When, in late March (see ref B), a large group of PDP Senators publicly branded the Yar'Adua administration's performance in its first two years as "unsatisfactory," this Villa clique clearly saw a threat to the President's, and their own, position. In response, the clique first had a series of surrogates denounce the Senators, and claim that the complaints were motivated by "immoral" and ambitious politicians who wanted to supplant Yar'Adua as the PDP candidate for 2011. They then stage-managed a series of public appearances, including the President's first press conference since taking office, and a 3-hour long interview with journalists from one of the country's leading newspapers. (Note: While the rambling content of that interview was likely to undermine the confidence in the President's condition of the presumably very small group who read it, the fact that he was able to sit and talk for three hours was much put about as evidence that he was, as they say, fine and getting better. End note.) In any case, the overall effort had the desired impact, as PDP politicians from all over the country began falling over themselves publicly to endorse Yar'Adua as the party's nominee for 2011, so much so that the President himself had to weigh in and say he would not be making any formal decision on standing for re-election until the second half of 2010.

For the Rest of the PDP: Playing a Bad Hand in the Dark

¶14. (S/NF) PDP leaders from outside the Villa clique know much less about the President's true condition. Some hope for the best -- that Yar'Adua's government will start to make at least some essential decisions, and that he personally will be able to continue in office at least until 2011, when the party could hopefully rethink its Presidential ticket. Some, however, fear the worst -- that the paralysis of his administration will continue until he has to leave office,

which will be well before the end of his term, meaning they will have to cope with the inherent instability of a Jonathan-led government. Most PDP insiders are hedging their bets between these two scenarios, at least publicly proclaiming their support for Yar'Adua's re-election while quietly poking around for alternatives.

¶15. (S/NF) Other PDP grandees, particularly former Presidents Obasanjo and Babangida, and former Defense Minister T.Y. Danjuma, have not tipped their hands as to specific alternative candidates, though Obasanjo may have some preference for Jigawa Governor Lamido (his former Foreign Minister) or Senate President David Mark. Former President Babangida told the Ambassador in April (ref J) that he did not think much about either the direction the PDP was going or the current Yar'Adua Administration. He hinted to be looking for other political party alternatives for 2011. The other names mentioned are those of PDP northern Governors, particularly Danjuma Goji of Gombe State, Isa Yuguda of Bauchi, Kwara Governor Saraki and perhaps Kaduna Governor Nnamadi Sambo. In the face of continuing uncertainty about Yar'Adua's true health condition, however, we doubt that any of these alternatives will stick his head particularly far above the parapet at this time.

2011 Scenario: If Yar'Adua Survives

¶16. (S/NF) All indications are that the Villa clique will maintain the line that the President intends to stand for re-election as long as Yar'Adua's health will allow, and -- were he actually to survive until 2011 -- they would seek to put him forward as the PDP candidate, and try to use the advantages of incumbency to get him the nomination. The clique is, in any case, working hard to strengthen its own position, appointing allies and key fixers to important, money generating positions, particularly of GON commissions and parastatals. The recent selection of Tony Anenih (a man whose corrupt performance as Works Minister in Obasanjo's first term is legendary) to head the Nigerian Ports Authority

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is one of several examples of this. Other key PDP power brokers who have now been appointed the Chairs of one or another of these entities include former PDP Chairman Barnabas Gemade to the Federal Housing Authority, Abiye Sekibo to the National Business and Technical Examination Board, Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu to the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission and Jimoh Ibrahim who has taken over as Chairman of the Corporate Affairs Commission. Clearly, the First Lady and other members of the Villa clique want to make sure that, whatever the President's condition, they will have assured themselves sufficient influence and wealth that the party will need to accommodate them and their interests in whatever decisions it makes for 2011. Several observers have speculated that, if Yar'Adua is not the 2011 presidential candidate, Turai has other members of the family in mind to put forward as the PDP's standard-bearer, particularly her two sons-in-law: Bauchi state Governor Yuguda and Kebbi state Governor Dakingari.

2011 Scenario: Yar'Adua Survives, But is Disabled

¶17. (S/NF) In a scenario where Yar'Adua lives until 2011 but is incapacitated and unable to be the candidate, we would be surprised if the Villa clique simply has its own way about selecting the PDP ticket. No matter how much the members of the Katsina clique strengthen their position, the party has quite a few godfathers with both the resources and the desire to put forward alternative candidates for the top job. (Note: Were the President to die or have to leave office short of the end of his term, we expect the same group of grandees to be pushing to nominate a strong Northern replacement who would serve as Vice President to Goodluck Jonathan. End Note.) We would not/not expect this political



pushing and shoving to be resolved through any sort of even remotely democratic process, however. Rather, we would anticipate a backroom deal would be worked out, presumably around some dark horse personality, as was the case when Vincent Ogbulafor was selected as PDP Chairman last year. We would also anticipate that Kwara Governor Saraki's increasingly powerful Governors' Forum might again play a key deal-making role in the process as they did in the PDP Chairmanship election in 2008.

Implications for the USG: What We Do

18. (S/NF) As the political dance within the PDP begins to pick up pace over the coming months, there are clear implications for the USG, and the agenda of political and economic reforms which we have been working to advance over the past two years. There has been very little progress on the democracy front on issues important to us ranging from electoral reform and anti-corruption to name a few. We would expect progress to further decline as we move toward the end of 2009 and everyone is in full election mode.

19. (S/NF) This lack of further progress on democratic issues is particularly true of electoral reform. While the Nigerian political class is very sensitive about international criticism of how it conducts domestic politics, there is little evidence that members of the political elite actually are prepared to alter their conduct in order to win favor with foreign observers. The leadership of the PDP has been particularly unrepentant about electoral reform, meeting criticism of how it conducts elections with little more than obfuscation and bald mendacity. There is, in any case, little evidence that any of the factions within the PDP see their position as likely to be enhanced by moving in the direction of significant electoral reform this side of the 2011 elections.

20. (S/NF) The early start to electioneering will also affect other aspects of our agenda. The political process here is very money-intensive, from the buying of the loyalty of rival factions to the logistical challenges of organizing what have

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sometimes been called "election-like events." In addition, those who believe themselves unlikely to win the next elections, or who have to depart office as they have reached term limits, will see the time left for acquiring personal wealth shortened. This is not the sort of situation likely to benefit the pursuit of our governance and anti-corruption goals.

21. (S/NF) Finally, as in most countries, as we move increasingly into the political campaign season, with its demands on the time and energy of politicians maneuvering to secure their own futures, the door for even the most well-intentioned to broker the kind of political compromises necessary to solve big problems will begin to close, at least for a while. Nigeria has more than its share of big political and economic problems, from the political and development issues in the Delta, to deteriorating infrastructure (especially electricity and power generation), to its continuing inability to resolve the problems of political unity among its diverse peoples. We see the prospects for real progress on any of these over the coming two years to be small, but we do recommend that we need to move more into the public arena on our concerns about Nigeria.

22. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS